



# Breaking Ground



The Wilson Family. (Top row) Robert Wilson II and Tremaine Wilson. (Bottom row) Robert Wilson and Marsha Wilson

## Overcoming the Odds

By Ned Andrew Solomon

One day it dawned on Marsha Wilson that, although her son, Robert, enjoyed attending church with his family, he wasn't really participating in church like the other youth. It's a common thread that runs through many families where there is a child with a disability. Enrolled in "inclusive" classrooms, after-school programs, summer camps—"accepted" in baseball leagues, dance companies, and social clubs, these kids

are "welcome"—but not experiencing anywhere near the full range of what the activities have to offer—or able to give what they have to offer the programs.

But Marsha didn't do what other parents with children with challenging behaviors, physical limitations, or cognitive issues too often do in these situations: nothing. Sitting back quietly. Not making waves—for fear of rocking a boat that was, after all, willing to take a child with unique needs. Instead she went to the top, and, in her charming but determined way, told church leaders what was lacking, how it could be better, how she could help to make it better, and how making it better for her son would miraculously make the entire churchgoing experience better for the whole congregation. In the process, Marsha not only got Robert truly "included" in his house of worship, she created a faith movement to assist other families with similar needs and life desires.

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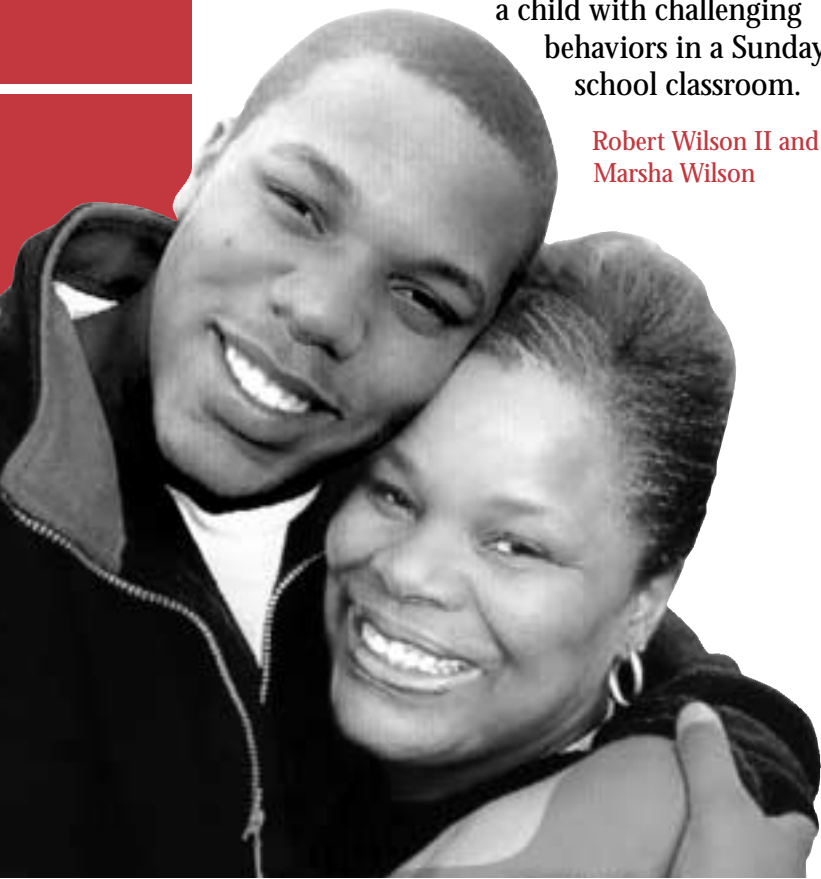
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With the full “eye-opened” support of Bishop Joseph Walker, and his brother, youth minister Darrel Walker, Mt. Zion Baptist Church gave birth to the Overcomers Ministry (OM). The church is 10,000 members and growing with four Middle Tennessee locations: on Old Hickory (“the Big House”), at Jefferson Street downtown, in GlenCliff and in Murfreesboro. As vast and far-reaching as that congregation sounds, be assured that all of the members have been informed repeatedly about the Overcomers, and several families have climbed aboard a train that shows no signs of slowing down.

The name Overcomers is derived from I John: 44. “We are all overcomers,” says Marsha. “It teaches children that God made you, God loves you and you are a gift, and you have gifts. You can’t believe in Genesis through Revelation and believe that Robert doesn’t have a purpose. All of us have a purpose. As a church base, our job is to fill them with the Holy Spirit word so that their purpose can blossom.”

The OM mission has gone far beyond identifying and encouraging an individual’s purpose. It empowers parents. It presents seminars and workshops on a variety of educational topics. It provides resources, like lending assistance for a child with challenging behaviors in a Sunday school classroom.

Robert Wilson II and  
Marsha Wilson



The Overcomers themselves go to trainings like SPAN-TN (Special Education Action Network), STEP (Support and Training for Exceptional Parents), and the Council on Developmental Disabilities’ Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute, so they can stay current and continue to be effective guides for their fellow parishioners. “We’re doing all that we can to be advocates for ourselves and other parents, and training them to be advocates for themselves,” says Jerome Franklin, whose own family has benefited from the Ministry, and who is now actively involved in a leadership role. Jerome and Annette’s son Scotty recently moved out of a totally segregated school setting to a typical classroom with appropriate supports and resources, thanks to some newly acquired family advocacy skills.

“It’s stewardship,” says Marsha. “I believe that God has given me Robert, and given us everything that we need. So we have to be good stewards and help others.”

Another big part of the OM is breaking down the walls that often keep members of the African American community from acknowledging and “coming out” when there is a disability in the family. “We run from it,” says Marsha. “There’s a lot of stigma attached to disability in our community. And we’re also over-identified. But I tell them if your child needs support, run to it!”

More and more people are bringing their children with disabilities to Mt. Zion Baptist Church because of the Overcomers. OM promotion includes advertisements in the church bulletin, announcements at services, a brochure, and a logo created by Robert. Founding Overcomers conducted a survey to identify families who might access their resources (and a second survey is currently in the planning stages) to ask families what they need, and what they can offer to others. There are no dues and no charges for OM activities, since Bishop Walker is adamant that all services to churchgoers remain free.

One of the most vital OM functions is letting parents know that there are other families out

# Supported Living Services Get Boost from Council

**I**n November, the Council on Developmental Disabilities awarded a Supported Living grant to the Down Syndrome Association of Middle Tennessee (DSAMT). This one-year grant will assist the DSAMT to begin offering companion-model supported living services to individuals with developmental disabilities who live in and around the Nashville area.

Supported living is a service that provides people with disabilities the individualized help they need to live successfully in a home of their choice. The companion model is one in which a person with a disability and the support person he or she has chosen and hired share a home together.

DSAMT also will be receiving funds from the Tennessee Division of Mental Retardation Services to provide this support.

By the end of June, 2003, DSAMT plans to have hired and trained at least six companions and estimates that two to four individuals will be receiving support services following the companion model. ■

## **For more information contact:**

**Sheila Moore, Executive Director, DSAMT**

**111 North Wilson Boulevard**

**Nashville, TN 37205**

**Phone: (615) 386-9002 Fax : (615) 386-9754**

**E-mail: [dsamt@bellsouth.net](mailto:dsamt@bellsouth.net)**

there with similar challenges. "When people have been out there by themselves, they feel like they're alone," says Jerome. "They're less likely to jump up and say they need help. Now they can see that there are other people that they can identify with. If we get all these parents participating, you can actually change the system!"

Recently, Steve Jacobs from The Arc of Tennessee conducted a PATH (Promoting Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) for the Overcomers – a visual representation of short- and long-term dreams and goals, identified and articulated by group members. Some short-term initiatives have already started, including better integrating children with a wide range of disabilities in worship services and Sunday school classes. "It's just blossomed to what all else we can do, and how can we all get involved," says Marsha. "It helps to know where we're headed, and having everybody of one accord. All these things we didn't even think about are now possible, and many we've already done!" Obtaining 501(c)3 status is a future goal of the OM PATH, to better serve the church and the greater community.

So much has happened in a relatively short amount of time. But do the children themselves believe they are benefiting from the Ministry's groundbreaking efforts? Well, to answer that question, we'll leave you with the profound insights of Marsha's son, Robert Wilson II. "The Overcomers Ministry is a great Ministry. The help families get is really a good thing. Young people like myself can overcome and parents can help them once they get the information and support. I also like the fact that other Mt. Zion families can bring their children with disabilities and worship freely. The support has helped me to overcome my fears of failing.

"I don't want anyone to feel sorry for me. I know, going to school everyday, that I have to try harder than the next guy. I struggle with my learning disability, but it is not who I am. I have trouble keeping up with my academics, but I know that I am an overcomer." ■

**Ned Andrew**

**Solomon is director**

**of the Partners in**

**Polycymaking™**

**Leadership Institute**

**at the Tennessee**

**Council on Developmental Disabilities.**

# Getting Help With Recent Changes to TennCare

By Lynette Swinford

**E**ffective January 1, 2003, the TennCare program changed due to a new Federal waiver. With all of the changes, it can sometimes be confusing to tell how updates to the program may affect individuals and families. The following is a list of resources where you can obtain additional information, seek help to understand how the changes to TennCare apply, or to file an appeal if coverage has been lost based on the new guidelines:

## Appeal Resources:

To file for an appeal because your TennCare has been terminated, a copy of the form can be printed at: **[www.state.tn.us/tenncare/medappeal.html](http://www.state.tn.us/tenncare/medappeal.html)**.

If you would like help in filing an appeal, you can contact the Tennessee Healthcare Campaign at: **1-800-280-8682** or **227-7500** in Nashville.

## Web Resources:

The current and future TennCare rules are now posted on TennCare's website at: **[www.state.tn.us/tenncare/TennCarerules.html](http://www.state.tn.us/tenncare/TennCarerules.html)**.

The TennCare members' page has a listing of the current and new copayments at: **[www.state.tn.us/tenncare/members.html](http://www.state.tn.us/tenncare/members.html)**.

"TennCare benefits" on the members' page shows current and future benefits at: **[www.state.tn.us/tenncare/benefits.htm](http://www.state.tn.us/tenncare/benefits.htm)**.

A useful site with current information and links is the Tennessee Healthcare Campaign at: **[www.thcc2.org](http://www.thcc2.org)**.

## Important TennCare Phone Numbers—All Are Free Calls

**TennCare Hotline: 1-800-669-1851** or **741-4800** in Nashville. Call this number to change your address, find out about eligibility, or to change plans.

**TennCare Solutions: 1-800-878-3192**. Call this number to file an appeal about problems getting medical care under TennCare or TennCare Partners. This includes getting drugs.

**TennCare Consumer Advocacy Program: 1-800-722-7474** or **313-9972** in Nashville. Call this number for problems getting care for urgent medical needs.

**TennCare Partners Advocacy Line: 1-800-758-1638** or **242-7339** in Nashville. Call this number for problems or questions on mental health and substance abuse services. (Se Habla Español)

**Hispanic TennCare Program:** ¿Habla Usted Español? Para más información del Proyecto en Español de TennCare, llame al Tel.: **(615) 227-7568**. Si es la distancia larga llame el Tel: **1-800-254-7568**.

**TTY-TDD Line: 1-800-772-7647** or **313-9240** in Nashville (for people with speech impairments or are deaf or hard of hearing.)

**Arabic/Kurdish Line: 1-877-652-3046**

Nashville area: **313-9840**

**Bosnian Line: 1-877-652-3069**

Nashville area: **313-9382**

**Somali Line: 1-877-652-3054**

Nashville area: **313-9894** ■

*Lynette Swinford  
is fiscal manager  
at the Tennessee  
Council on  
Developmental  
Disabilities.*



# Explorers Unlimited Art Exhibit

**A**rt work by teens and young adults with Down syndrome that is a result of a unique university and community collaboration was exhibited January through March 2003 at Vanderbilt University's John F. Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development. Explorers Unlimited is a



"Ocean, Fire, Rain" Acrylic on canvas

## Tennessee Disability Training Network

[www.disabilitytrainingtn.org](http://www.disabilitytrainingtn.org)

A searchable calendar of training events and other Tennessee and national disability-related events. The Network's mission is to collect and organize information about training, to promote and communicate training information, and to work together to meet training needs through planning and resource development.

summer academic camp for youth and young adults with Down syndrome. Begun in July 2002, the camp was established by the Kennedy Center and the Down Syndrome Association of Middle Tennessee in partnership with Peabody College's Department of Special Education, University School of Nashville, and the Frist Center for the Visual Arts. The Frist Center's educational staff worked with the students in discussing, creating, and evaluating works of art. Students saw the Frist photographic exhibit "Selections of 1000 Families" and expressed their ideas about self-identity and family by creating their own paintings, photographs, and collages. Their art experience concluded with a reception at the Frist Center co-sponsored by VSA Tennessee. The exhibit can be viewed Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. (view exhibit online at [www.vanderbilt.edu/kennedy/news/art.html](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/kennedy/news/art.html)).

## Tennessee Family Pathfinder [www.familypathfinder.org](http://www.familypathfinder.org)

A one-stop Internet gateway to services and resources in Tennessee and to national resources, including Spanish sites.

Link to "Search for Services" to search the TDIR database of 1400 agencies by county and service type.

Pathfinder and TDIR are projects of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and the John F. Kennedy Center, Vanderbilt University.

Explorers Unlimited academic camp is tentatively scheduled for July 7-August 1, 2003, and will be held again at the University School of Nashville. ■

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## For more information contact:

[elise.mcmillan@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:elise.mcmillan@vanderbilt.edu)

Daniel (right) created "Ocean, Fire, Rain" while attending this year's Explorers Unlimited summer academic camp.



Tennessee Disability Information and Referral Office (TDIR) For individuals with disabilities, family members, and agencies.

For information about disability services and supports call:

Statewide	800 640-INFO (4636)
TDD	800 273-9595
Nashville	(615) 322-8529

2001-02 East, Middle, and West Tennessee Services & Supports Directories available

\$20 per directory or \$40 full set  
Call or place order by Internet  
<http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/devents/order.html> ■

## Help You Can Really Use

# Kindred Shows Neighbors, Friends, Relations

By Jim Summerville

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**K**indred is an exhibit of photographs of Tennesseans with disabilities by Simon R. Fulford, with descriptions by Ned Andrew Solomon. *Kindred* was created by the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and the John F. Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development at Vanderbilt University. The exhibit has toured Tennessee cities and towns since January 2000. A host committee at each exhibit site held a regional reception at the exhibit opening and conducted arts education activities for children and adults, with and without disabilities. *Kindred* opened at Progress, Inc. in Nashville in December, 2002.

Recently, *Breaking Ground* spoke with the two artists behind the project.

**BG:** When you began this project, what were your expectations? Did you find out there among Tennessee folks with disabilities what you thought you would? Or did you have some surprises? What important happened to you, the photographer and writer, between the concept and the execution?

**Ned:** My initial feeling about the project was pure excitement! The opportunity to collaborate on the book and traveling exhibit with another artist—working in a different, visual medium—was extremely unique and creatively fulfilling. What I didn't realize ahead of time was how fun and easy it would be, because the individuals and families we profiled invited us in, unconditionally, to share their lives for a day or two, and let us be privy to their most personal emotions and dreams. That was the aspect that allowed me to understand most clearly that people with disabilities are just like everybody else.

**Simon:** I don't think I had any real expectations for what we would find or who we would meet, but that isn't to say I wasn't completely amazed by the entire trip! If there was a "surprise" it was the diversity of life stories experienced by all the people we met. As we criss-crossed the state, every person added another dimension to the humanity we were witnessing: from rural to urban, Baptist church to Renaissance Festival, single mother to family of eight, 2-year-old infant to 80-year-old grandma and homemaker to engineer. Every story, every life, showed the



Six of the Tennesseans who tell their stories in *Kindred*. Left to right: Joanna Madison, Nashville; Michael Seay, Memphis; Dylan and Chastity Rogers Jackson. Opposite page: Joey and Michael Dinsmore and Teresa Fulwiler, Fall Branch. Page 8: Jamie Lytton, Humboldt.



depth of life-experience of people with disabilities. When you spend two weeks being reminded how beautiful life is, with all the struggles and smiles that that entails, you are not as surprised as you are exhilarated!

**BG:** A generation ago, people with disabilities might have been just as independent, but they were not as visible—and they were stigmatized. What has changed/is changing? And why?

**Simon:** To refer back to my previous point and yours, it is not that people with disabilities are having experiences they never had before, but those experiences are perhaps fuller—and being shared with the rest of the world. A generation ago people with disabilities went to church, but didn't get to go to Sunday School, or sat in the back so that the family could leave immediately

after the service. Yes they went to school, but they were segregated to classrooms in the basement and only met their fellow students in the halls and at assembly. Yes they had jobs, but they were doing menial tasks.

What is changing now is that people with disabilities are sharing their experiences and living their lives WITH US all the time. Their lives, views, opinions, needs and wants are being taken seriously and being incorporated into the fabric of our communities.

Why is this happening? Because we demand it. Because people don't wish to be hypocritical any more. Because people with disabilities are acknowledged as our father, sister, classmate, colleague, neighbor.

**Ned:** The largest contributing factor to the increased visibility of people with disabilities in their communities has to be ground-breaking



legislation like the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which promoted the access of public buildings, services and schools by people with disabilities. The simple addition of ramps and accessible parking spaces has made it possible for folks with mobility issues to get where they've always wanted to go! And businesses have discovered that—guess what?— people with disabilities like to buy things too, and can add considerably to their bottom lines.

I also believe that, backed by these legislative mandates, families and individuals have pushed more to get access and services and to be included in all aspects of daily living. But most of these efforts require a critical mass of people—and when individuals with disabilities were sequestered in their own homes, or worse, in large living facilities, they couldn't put their heads, hearts and hopes together to make significant societal change.

**BG: So many pictures in our day and time are ephemeral. The images from *Kindred* and the words about them travel on. Your thoughts about why this project is essentially timeless?**

**Ned:** To begin with, fantastic photographs and compelling human interest stories are timeless. I never tire of looking at any of Simon's photographs, because he did such an extraordinary job of capturing each person's personality. We made a real effort to focus on different age groups and a multitude of settings, so I think people from all walks of life could continue to relate to the visual and verbal imagery. But most of all,



the message is timeless: that people with disabilities are more like than unlike their neighbors.

**Simon:** I think that this project is timeless for two reasons. The first is simply because life goes on. The lives that we illustrated through words and pictures are still being lived by those very people and millions of people like them.

When you see one of the

photos and read the caption, you not only learn about Joey or Dawn, but you learn about your friend next door, your grandmother, your cousin, your wife. *Kindred* is timeless because it is really a mirror, and every reflection in a mirror is alive in that moment and lives on when it walks away.

The second reason I think the project is timeless is because of the medium. Ned and I chose simple words and simple pictures. Black text on a white page and black-and-white photos. We chose not to impose ourselves as artists into the project. When you experience *Kindred*, you don't experience us, you experience the people in it. The medium is not glossy, not high-tech. Its simplicity makes it timeless.

The *Kindred* web site, which includes arts education information and links to sites on disabilities and the arts may be found at [www.vanderbilt.edu/kennedy/kindred](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/kennedy/kindred). ■

**For more information on arrangements for loan of *Kindred* contact:**

**The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities**

**Phone: (615) 532-6615**

**TTY: (615) 741-4562**

*Jim Summerville is editor of Breaking Ground.*



# Access Tennessee! It's Good Business!

By Lorre Leon Mendelson

**I**n August 2001, my husband, a gifted songwriter, and I decided to move to Nashville. We became enchanted with Tennessee: the heartbeat of southern hospitality, wonderful music, the Smoky mountains, old timey music, autumn leaves, friendly people, Americana music, southern cooking, bluegrass music, farmers markets, blues music, fun cafés, restaurants and, of course, country music!

As an individual with a disability, a disability advocate, and active in many community activities, I am aware of physical and attitudinal barriers for people with disabilities and family members. Last March, I wanted to locate a restaurant where I could celebrate my birthday. After numerous phone calls and networking with friends, I located the right restaurant (total access) and we had a grand time. I would like to make that search easier for other Tennesseans through this article and encourage community members to create a database of accessible businesses in their cities for tourists as well as residents.

This article is based on the following principles:

- Tennesseans with disabilities comprise approximately 22% of our population, participating in all arenas, including employment, the service industry, media, and the medical and legal professions, and contribute significantly to Tennessee's economy.
- The ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) is not just a good policy: it is a civil rights law designed to protect the rights of all Americans with disabilities and their family members.
- People with disabilities need to be consulted before an accommodation is offered or created on their behalf.
- Access to services includes children and adults.
- Accessible consists of attitudinal and physical practices.

Businesses, recreational facilities, and music venues expand their customer base, and their sales as well, when increasing the scope of customer services with greater accessibility.

While some structures are "grandfathered in" and don't have to provide access, I believe taking the extra step to become accessible literally opens doors of opportunity to sellers and patrons. Advocates like myself need to take advantage of opportunities for praise when we catch someone doing something well. Sometimes we are quick to criticize, and can be more generous in giving positive recognition to those business and programs which are accessible.

Community access could be paved parking with entrances to a building with ramps instead of steps built within ADA architectural standards (not too steep and a level area on which to open doors). Accessible might mean menus with alternative formats such as audio-tape, CDs, and Braille for people who don't read written print. Mail could be sent by email and audiotapes rather than paper postal mail. Sales staff in retail establishments can assist shoppers. Sometimes it might be as obvious as doors that open automatically or have paddle handles rather than knobs.

Some restaurants I visited were almost accessible but ramps were too steep for a person using a walker, a parent pushing a stroller, or a person who uses a wheelchair and some were used as break areas for employees, blocked by bicycles, or holding garden equipment. Some businesses unintentionally block the pathway of people with disabilities by putting merchandise or adding outdoor seating on sidewalks. I have not visited any restaurants with automatic doors but a call ahead informing the restaurant you will need a door opened should be greeted with appreciation of your patronage.

I often receive questions about what to do if a public facility or  
*continued on the next page*

**Lorre Leon Mendelson is a disability activist, advocate, educator and writer. She is employed by Tennessee Protection & Advocacy, Inc. as an Advocate and Program Manager for the Tennessee Voter Empowerment Project of People with Disabilities funded by the Council on Developmental Disabilities. Lorre identifies herself as an individual with psychiatric diagnoses.**

business is not accessible. One option is talking with the owner/manager about ways you would like to access services, merchandise, or information. Web sites and e-mail on the internet, verbal information, holding doors open for customers, installing a door-bell, or bringing merchandise and services to the customer can create access to and for many customers.

Other options include learning more about your rights and community resources for access by contacting Tennessee Protection and Advocacy, Inc. at 800-342-1660.

There are numerous establishments and services throughout Tennessee to be commended for creating access for people with disabilities, both physical and attitudinal. People providing architectural changes, changes in attitude toward people with cognitive disabilities,

bringing services to customers where the physical access is not available, web site and internet services and merchandise just to name a few. These companies have opened their marketplace to the whole community. It is important we share with each other information on which places are accessible in all of our communities and I encourage people to network as they learn of these accessible venues. ■

**For more information contact:**

**Lorre Leon Mendelson**  
**Tennessee Protection & Advocacy, Inc.**  
**2416 21st Avenue South, #100**  
**Nashville, TN 37212**  
**Phone: (615) 298-1080 x12**  
**<http://www.tpainc.org>**

## Meet Your Peers at the Mega Conference

By Holly Yarbrough

June 2003 will be an exciting time for the Tennessee disability community! Over 50 disability-related organizations are coming together on June 19, 20, 21 and 22 to present the first ever Disability Mega Conference in Tennessee. The purpose of the conference is to strengthen our bonds and promote understanding as we move forward together, united in our desire for independence, choice and dignity for all people.

A variety of exciting national speakers will be presented, as well as an informative assortment of workshops and round-table discussions on disability issues concerning:

- Access (to services, programs & facilities)
- Empowerment (self-advocacy and education)
- Education (elementary, sec-

- ondary and higher education)
- Support Systems (health care, transportation, personal attendant services)
- Housing (affordability and access)
- Employment (services, programs, strategies)
- Systems Change (grassroots organizing, legislative affairs, group advocacy)

### What

Sharing Our Strength:  
 Empowerment, Inclusion,  
 Self-Determination, and  
 Choice Annual Tennessee  
 Mega Conference & Gala  
 Celebration for People With  
 Disabilities

### Where

Cool Springs Marriott Hotel  
 & Conference Center  
 700 Cool Springs Blvd.  
 Franklin, Tennessee 37067

**[www.franklinmarriott.com](http://www.franklinmarriott.com)**

Phone: 615 261-6100

Fax: 615 261-6148

Worldwide Reservations:

1-800-228-9290

Room rate: \$89 for "Disability Mega Conference" participants. Reservations must be made before May 29, 2003. Be sure to mention the Mega Conference to get the special rate. ■

### Who to contact

Exhibitors: Peggy Cooper  
[pcooper@thearc.org](mailto:pcooper@thearc.org)

Registration: (615) 248-5878 or  
 toll-free 800-835-7077

Presentation Proposals:  
 Steve Jacobs  
[sjacobsarc@aol.com](mailto:sjacobsarc@aol.com)

Marketing & Public Relations:  
 Holly Yarbrough  
[holly@tpainc.org](mailto:holly@tpainc.org)

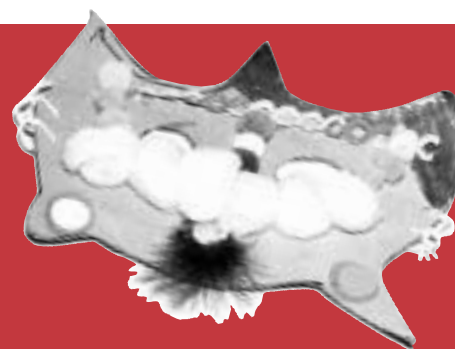
**[www.tndisabilitymegaconference.org](http://www.tndisabilitymegaconference.org)**

EVENT

First Ever  
 Disability  
 MEGA  
 conference  
 to be held in  
 Nashville

JUNE JUNE  
 19-22 2004

EVENT



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# Breaking Ground Arts Issue 2003

Inviting you to contribute to a special issue of *Breaking Ground* devoted to the arts. Coming in September 2003. Submit all entries by July 15.

Do you write short stories or poetry? Do you paint, draw, or take pictures? Then we'd like to see your work for possible publication! The editor will consider

- fiction up to 1,000 words and poems

- photos, drawings, and cartoons, which can include people and be about humorous or serious subjects.

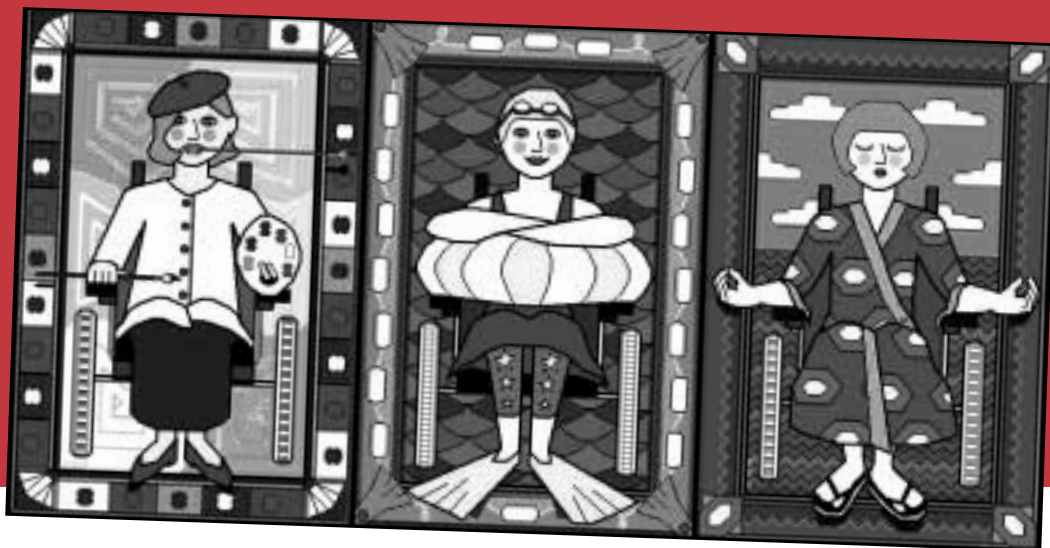
This material must reproduce well in black-and-white.

Content is devoted to materials by or about people with disabilities.

We'll give contributors a prominent by-line, a biographical note, and copies of the issue.

Please address your submissions to Editor, *Breaking Ground* Vanderbilt University Peabody Box 40 230 Appleton Place Nashville, Tennessee 37203-5701

For questions contact:  
[jim.summerville@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:jim.summerville@vanderbilt.edu)  
Phone: (615) 322-8473 or 1-800-288-0403  
TTY: (615) 343-3330 or 1-800-288-3311





## State Agency Receives National Honor for Housing Initiative

**T**he Creating Homes Initiative (CHI), a program of the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, recently became the honored recipient of the 2002 National Lilly Reintegration Housing Award.

The award is sponsored by Eli Lilly and Company to recognize healthcare professionals and patient advocates who have made outstanding contributions in helping people with schizophrenia and bipolar disorders to live in their communities.

Under the slogan “2005 by 2005,” CHI has fulfilled its promise to provide 2005 people with mental illness permanent housing options by the year 2005. As we go to press, funding for 2,755 new, permanent housing options were secured.

Since it was started in August 2000 by Ms. Elizabeth Rukeyser, then commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, CHI has had the participation of faith-based groups, nonprofit organizations, architects and homebuilders, advocates, service providers, realtors, and federal, state, and local agencies concerned with housing development.

Ms. Marie Williams, director of the program from its beginning, noted that the Lilly Award was not the result of any effort by one party but reflects the overall contributions of many dedicated people and organizations across the state. “This honor belongs to everyone who has contributed their time, energy, and funding toward the realization of our goals,” she said.

Ms. Rukeyser stressed the importance of CHI and its ongoing quest to provide safe, decent, quality permanent and affordable housing options for Tennesseans with mental illness.

Commissioner Rukeyser said. “One of my major priorities has been to create and expand a full continuum of safe, appropriate, affordable houses for individuals with mental illness. We are doing what we said we’d do—help fulfill the dreams and needs of the people we serve.



(Pictured left to right) Mary Gormley, Mary Simons, John Miller, Jeanne Price, Marie Williams, Cheré Bradshaw, Jennifer Green, and Rozann Downing received recognition for their work in assisting the more than 2005 people with housing.





**Photo 1:** Left is Octavia Brown, a consumer in Memphis, who is living in the CHI house pictured, developed by H.E.L.P.I.N.G., CDC. **Photo 2:** From left to right. Commissioner Elisabeth Rukeyser; Mary Simons, Regional Housing Facilitator, Region III, AIM Center; and John Miller, Regional Housing Facilitator, Region II, Ridgeview MHC. The Commissioner is presenting John a plaque of appreciation for his work on the CHI. **Photo 3:** Commissioner Rukeyser and Rozann Downing, Regional Housing Facilitator, Region VI, Carey Counseling Center. **Photo 4:** Individuals who attended the press conference about 2005 by 2005.

“We are extremely honored to receive such a prestigious award,” she continued, “But we cannot rest on our laurels. We must continue our efforts and work with individuals and communities to remedy this problem.”

CHI is operated by the Office of Housing and Planning Development (OHPD) in cooperation with other public agencies and private partners. OHPD’s annual budget of \$2.5 million, combined with federal, state, and local funds, seeks to produce permanent housing options such as

- Home ownership
- Supervised group housing with 24-hour on-site care
- Partially supervised group housing
- Public and private market rental housing

The Lilly Reintegration Awards were judged by an independent panel of psychiatric care professionals, who rated each nominated program on its planning, execution, outcomes and evaluation, and importance.

**The home on the left is one of Foundations Associates in Memphis. The home on the right is one of Behavioral Health Initiatives, Inc. (BHI) in Puryear.**

The award carries with it a cash prize of \$5,000. Ms. Williams said that the funds would be put toward an upcoming anti-discrimination campaign, adding, “We need to continually let people know that it’s not okay to shun those with mental illness.”

The website of the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities has a housing resource locator. It is designed to help individuals and families find existing housing options. The locator, which is continually updated, provides a link to independent and shared living resources. This site can be found at [www.state.tn.us/mental](http://www.state.tn.us/mental). ■

**For further information contact:  
The Office of Housing Planning  
and Development  
Phone: (615) 253-3051**

**(Left) Marie Williams, Director of the Office of Housing and Development, and Melanie Hampton, Assistant Commissioner of the Division of Mental Health Services.**



# Implementing the *Olmstead* Decision in Tennessee

By The Tennessee *Olmstead* Coalition

**O**n June 22, 1999, the United States Supreme Court in *Olmstead vs. L.C.* ruled that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) may require states to provide community-based services rather than institutional placements for individuals with disabilities. The decision:

- upholds the United States Department of Justice's regulations, which mandate that a state must administer its programs in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of individuals with disabilities;
- declares that unjustified isolation is properly regarded as discrimination on the basis of disability under the ADA; and
- recognizes that the United States Congress intended the ADA to step up earlier efforts in the Developmental Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act to secure community living opportunities for people with disabilities.

*Olmstead* affects all people with a current or previous disability or who are regarded as having a disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities. This includes people who currently reside in institutions, including mental health institutions, developmental centers, nursing homes, inappropriate placements in correctional facilities, and individuals at risk of institutionalization.

All states, including Tennessee, are mandated to provide community settings for individuals who would otherwise be entitled to institutional services when:

1. community placement is determined to be appropriate by the state's treatment professionals,
2. the individual does not oppose community placement, and
3. community placement can be reasonably accommodated, taking into account available resources and the needs of others receiving disability services.

The ruling suggested that a state could establish compliance with Title II of the ADA in two ways. First, it must demonstrate that it has a

comprehensive, effective plan for placing qualified persons with disabilities in less restrictive settings. Second, its waiting list for such services must move at a reasonable pace not controlled by the state's endeavors to keep its institutions fully populated.

The *Olmstead* decision is also important for what it does not say:

- It does not say that all institutions must be closed.
- It does not say when community services must be available.
- It does not say that lack of resources alone is a valid excuse for failure to move qualified individuals into the community.
- It does not say a state's responsibility is limitless.
- It does not say that modification must be made which would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program or activity.

## Where Tennessee Is Now

In a report on implementation issued by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), forty states plus the District of Columbia have task forces, commissions or agency work groups to assess current long-term care systems. Tennessee is not one of those states. Its government departments are not working together to address common needs, to eliminate overlapping responsibilities, or provide services and supports in a way to make the most efficient use of resources.

Tennessee ranks 45th in the country in providing Home and Community-Based (HCBS) Waiver services (NCSL, 2001). Total expenditures for institutional levels of care in Tennessee amount to 88% of our long-term care dollars. When taken separately, however, Medicaid resources for home health services and the Medicaid's Waivers for Aged, Aged/Disabled, and Physically Disabled, which are intended to offer persons a community option instead of nursing homes, comprise only one percent (1%) of our long-term care expenditures.

Olmstead affects all people with a current or previous disability or who are regarded as having a disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

Two dire consequences follow from this funding pattern. The first is long waiting lists for people with disabilities of all ages, including seniors, youth transitioning from special education who are left to sit at home after they leave school, and other adults left to live with family members. There is also an ever growing reliance on institutional levels of care.

### **Our Position**

We want to be part of the solution to develop community supports and services so that people with disabilities have the freedom to make meaningful choices about where and how to live and will be able to obtain needed supports to maintain their personal freedom.

### **Necessary Outcomes**

In order to create a comprehensive and cohesive system of community supports and services for Tennesseans of all ages with disabilities, we believe that it is imperative that Governor Phil Bredesen take immediate action in keeping with the urgency of need evident across the State.

In order to establish a new era of a systematic, fiscally, and programmatically sound approach to home and community-based services in Tennessee, we call for Governor Bredesen to:

- issue an executive order establishing goals for addressing the *Olmstead* decision and the means of implementing those goals.
- create a Commission to oversee and be accountable for the implementation of the home and community-based services and supports goals.
- support the development and expansion of current Home and Community-Based Services waivers that will provide sufficient resources to address the diversion, prevention, and deinstitutionalization of people with disabilities who choose to live in the community.
- assure that the responsible and efficient funding of services for people with disabilities will allow for the money to flow with the person as he or she returns to the community.

- call for the development of cost-efficient models that allow consumers to direct their services and supports including use of their funds.
- provide for the independent contracting of needs assessments for all people with disabilities currently living in institutions who choose to move to the community.

### **A Governor's Commission on Home and Community-Based Services and Support**

The Tennessee Olmstead Coalition recommends that the governor appoint this commission within 90 days. The panel should identify existing barriers including existing policies, rules, and regulations. It should also oversee an investigation into promising practices on a national level, conduct a review of existing programs, and identify needed programs based on the results of the individual needs assessments as well as a review of existing waiting lists.

Finally, the Governor's Commission should draft and submit to the General Assembly any legislation needed in order to restructure State government for programmatic or fiscal efficiency in expanding home and community-based services and to redirect any revenue sources that may be better put to use.

We recommend that the Commission include all appropriate State officials, key legislators, and representatives of groups committed to the expansion of home and community based services in Tennessee. Fifty-one percent of the commission should be composed of people with disabilities, family members, and representatives of disability advocacy groups. ■

**For more information about The Tennessee Olmstead Coalition contact one of the co-chairs:**

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**E-mail: [wrogers@theartn.org](mailto:wrogers@theartn.org)**

**Ruthie Marie Beckwith**

**Phone: (615) 898-0300**

**E-mail: [empfanatic@aol.com](mailto:empfanatic@aol.com)**



Steven Zee Sheegog, Sr.



Diana Seavey



Marti Finch

## Council Welcomes New Members

**T**he Council on Developmental Disabilities is pleased to welcome several new members from across the State. In the next several issues of *Breaking Ground* we will present biographical sketches of each of these individuals.

### Steven Zee Sheegog, Sr.

Steven Zee Sheegog, Sr. lives in Memphis. He was recently appointed Vice-President and Compliance Audit Manager for First Tennessee National Corporation, where he been employed for 15 years. He received a BBA in accounting, with a minor in political science from the University of Memphis in 1986.

His civic activities include memberships in the Memphis Chapter of the Institute of Internal Auditors, the LCM Chapter of the University of Memphis Alumni Association, the Student Activity Center in Memphis, and the Linwood-Kassell Neighborhood Association. He is also a 1997 graduate of the Tennessee Partners in Policymaking™ program, past member of the Memphis City Schools Department of Exceptional Children Parent Advisory Board, and parent speaker for the U. T. Boling Center of Memphis.

Steven has been married 17 years to LeVon Denise Sheegog, and has two children, Steven II (15) and Alisha (13). Steven II has developmen-

tal delays, and has attended Memphis City Schools for his entire educational career.

"I strongly believe that persistence and prayer will move mountains. My wife and I have been blessed with the responsibility of raising two children. We will perform to the best of our ability to carry out that task. My work for the Tennessee Council for Developmental Disabilities will not only allow me to accomplish that mission for my son, but for all who have an interest in the area of disabilities."

### Diana Seavey

Diana Seavey lives in Cleveland, Tennessee, where she is currently a planning member for the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities. She is also a member of the Epilepsy Foundation and Tourette Syndrome Association, and a Partners in Policymaking™ graduate from the 2000 class. She recently initiated a LINK (Leaders In Education Networking for Kids) Committee for Bradley County, and is especially excited about the emerging possibilities for systemic change in local and State school systems.

When she isn't attending meetings or advocating for others, Diana enjoys spending time with her family, her horse and two dogs, and cooking and reading. As a former pre-school



teacher, she keeps up on the latest research and issues concerning early childhood development, and hopes one day to publish her own pre-K curriculum.

Diana is married to “a wonderful and patient man” and has four children who range in age from 6 to 18. Three of her children have neurological and learning disabilities.

“I always try to keep in mind something my father instilled in me while growing up, which helps me persevere when a problem seems insurmountable and that is, never, NEVER, **NEVER** give up because, ‘with God all things are possible!’ My goal as a Council member for the CDD is that I contribute my voice, my energy and my time to help develop a better playing field in society for individuals with disabilities and their families.”

#### **Marti Finch**

Marti Finch is the executive director and co-founder of People Place, a volunteer program

sponsored by The Arc of Sullivan County. People Place is a new, nonprofit, consumer-controlled, service-directed program for people with any type of disability. Assisted by a dedicated staff of volunteers, Marti helps people find solutions to challenging situations, and teaches them to advocate for themselves to make positive changes. Previously she has worked at three Centers for Independent Living in Tennessee and Virginia.

Marti graduated from the University of California, and is the “proud mother of twin daughters.” Her motto is “when ordinary people have equal opportunities, extraordinary things can happen!

“As a new member to the Council I am excited to have the opportunity to learn from those I will be meeting and working with. Representing my peers, I have Cerebral Palsy. I hope to contribute not only professionally but also from personal experience. Since I use a wheelchair I plan to be a good ‘roll-model.’” ■

## New Officers Take the Helm at the Council

**D**uring his last weeks in office, Governor Don Sundquist named the new Chair and Vice-Chair for the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

The new Chair is **Andrea Cooper** of Nashville. Andrea has been an At-Large member of the Council for two years. On the Council, she previously served as Chair of the Proposal Review Committee and as Chair of the Planning and Priorities Committee. Andrea is very active in the community, serving on the Nashville Mayor's Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities, Chair of the Transportation Coalition and Chair of Tennessee Disability Voters. Andrea also helps organize the annual Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee pageants and served as Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee 2001.

Andrea is a lawyer and she did her internship with Legal Services of Middle Tennessee. She

believes in the importance of maintaining one's place at home, in the family, and in society. She is particularly interested in the development and expansion of home-based support services in Tennessee.

The Council's new Vice-Chair is **Joyce Elaine Sievers** of Smithville. Joyce has served on the Council, representing the Upper Cumberland Development District, for two years. She also is current Chair of the Council's Proposal Review Committee. Joyce is a graduate of the first class of the Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute (1993-94). She is currently the Family Support Coordinator at Pacesetters, Inc., in Cookeville. As the parent of a daughter with a developmental disability, Joyce says it matters to her to be a part of the process that works to provide individuals with a disability the opportunity to live to their fullest potential. ■



## Tennessee Disability Voters Expands Voter Initiative

*By Andrea Cooper*

**T**he Tennessee Disability Voters have been meeting monthly since April 2002, and they are making great strides in the advancement of disability voting issues. The group is working on enhancing public and political awareness of how disability issues are considered at the polls. In August, the Tennessee Disability Voters cosponsored a televised gubernatorial debate on health care issues at Meharry Medical College. Similarly, the Tennessee Disability Voters teamed up with the Nashville League of Women Voters to present a panel discussion on disability and voting at the League's October general meeting. (A videotape of this meeting is available from United Cerebral Palsy of Middle Tennessee, 615-242-4091.) The Tennessee Disability Voters also has a media polling committee, which is working on getting disability-related questions in election surveys.

The committee wants to make sure that the media and political candidates take note of the significance of disability voters as a voting bloc. The Tennessee Disability Voters likewise has encouraged persons with disabilities to increase public awareness of disability voting by volunteering as election officials.

One large component of the Tennessee Disability Voters' effort has been education. Tennessee Protection and Advocacy (TP&A), with a grant from the Council on

Developmental Disabilities (CDD), has taken the lead on educating election officials, individuals with disabilities and family members of individuals with disabilities about the voting rights of persons with disabilities. In addition to holding training sessions, TP&A has organized a committee to develop educational materials including literature about voting rights, key deadlines and election dates, a contact list for help, and information about how groups can organize their own voting campaign. This information will be available in an electronic format also. The committee foresees various agencies using the packet as a startup kit to get their own voter initiatives started at the local level. Agencies will be able to put materials on their own letterhead or add their own logo in addition to the Tennessee Disability Voters' logo. The educational materials committee is also working with the State Election Commission to determine whether a disability voting rights poster can be posted in every poll.

Another large component is voter registration and participation. The CDD gave a grant to the Tennessee Disability Coalition (TDC) to pursue its project of VOTE! Campaign. VOTE! is a nonpartisan initiative designed to increase the political participation of people with disabilities and to increase the influence of people with disabilities in the political process. The TDC has been working to organize action committees in local communities, register "disability" voters, promote the implementation of the

**Andrea Cooper is chair of Tennessee Disability Voters and of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.**



National Voter Registration Act, and expand its disability voter database. By maintaining a database, the TDC can help the Tennessee Disability voters keep track of how many members of the disability community are registered to vote and how many are voting.

The TDC has hired two energetic women to lead the VOTE! Project. The VOTE! Project Coordinator Joanne Rich is originally from New York. She taught English as a second language for ten years in New York and Nashville and spent four years teaching in Barcelona, Spain. In 2000, she graduated from UT Nashville with a Master's Degree in Social Work. She did her field placement at the Tennessee Justice Center, where she worked with the legal staff on TennCare and Families First issues. Before coming to the Tennessee Disability Coalition, she worked for two years as Coordinator of "Nashville Diversity in Dialogue," a program that organizes dialogues all over Nashville on racism, immigration, diversity education and other community issues.

The VOTE! Organizer Lucy Du, was born and raised in Nashville, Tennessee. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. As a student, Lucy interned in various political arenas, including the State House of Representatives Clerks Office and for U.S. Representative Bob Clement. As the VOTE! Organizer, Lucy will be responsible for developing and supporting local VOTE! committees, in addition to implementing a Get-Out-The-Vote campaign.

Joanne and Lucy have been helping to organize local "steering committees" to get disability voters organized at the grass roots level. The organizational meetings combine the registration expertise of the TDC with the educational expertise of TP&A to give voters and potential voters all of the information and tools they need to be active in civic life. Organizational meetings took place in October in Madison, Shelby, Montgomery, Rutherford, Maury, Knox, and Anderson counties. There are still 87 counties to cover, so *Breaking Ground* readers are encouraged to contact the TDC or the CDD for help with organizing meetings in their home counties.

The Tennessee Disability Voters' work did not end after the November elections. Educating and registering voters is an ongoing process. Additionally, some changes to the Tennessee voting system will take time. The Tennessee Disability Voters has established a legislative committee to examine legislative reform needed to make voting more accessible to voters with disabilities. By the same token, physical accessibility to many polls for voters with disabilities will require architectural as well as legislative change. The Tennessee Disability Voters has a physical accessibility committee to address those needs.

The Tennessee Disability Voters needs you! We are over 20 agencies strong, but we need more agencies, individuals and family members. ■

**If you would like to get involved,  
please contact:**

**CDD at (615) 532-6615  
TDC at (615) 383-9442 or  
TP&A at 1-800-342-1660**

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## About the Council:

The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities provides leadership to ensure independence, productivity, integration, and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the community through promotion of systems change.

The editor will consider for publication original contributions, including news and feature stories, short fiction, poetry, artwork, and photographs but reserves the right to edit or decline publication. Brief letters to the editor are also welcome. Opinions expressed in any published matter are the author's and not necessarily those of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities or its staff.

This free publication is produced six times a year by the John F. Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development at Vanderbilt University. Subscription requests, change of address, and submissions for possible publication should be directed to the Editor, *Breaking Ground*, Vanderbilt University, Peabody Box 40, Nashville, Tennessee 37203. Telephone (615) 322-8473 or 1-800-288-0403; TDD (615) 343-3330 or 1-800-288-3311; FAX (615) 322-8236. E-mail: [Jim.Summerville@Vanderbilt.edu](mailto:Jim.Summerville@Vanderbilt.edu)

Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities Grant Number 1-03999-1-0. Authorization Number 339371, July 2001. 5,600 copies. This public document was promulgated at a cost of \$.46 per copy.



Hold the date! Disability Mega Conference set for June 19-22. See page 10.

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# Breaking Ground

## Reader Survey

Would you take a minute to give us your opinion of *Breaking Ground*? We hope that it helps you in your work or family setting and keeps you informed about disability issues in Tennessee. Tell us how we might change it to meet those goals.

1. How much of *Breaking Ground* do you read?
  - ☐ All
  - ☐ Most
  - ☐ Less than half
2. Is the newsletter readable (inviting, easy to read) and clearly written and edited?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ Somewhat
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ No opinion
3. Do you find *Breaking Ground* informative and interesting?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ Somewhat
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ No opinion
4. Do you like the way the newsletter looks?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ Somewhat
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ No opinion

What changes to *Breaking Ground* would you like to see?

Content: \_\_\_\_\_  
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